United Nations

Centre against Apartheid

Notes and Documents

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ARTISTS AND ENTERTAINERS AGAINST APARTHEID: AN UPDATE

[Note: This paper, which is issued at the request of the Special Committee against Apartheid, forms part of the documentation of the Second Symposium on Cultural and Academic Links with South Africa, to be held at Los Angeles from 10 to 12 May 1991.]

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I. BACKGROUND

Artists and entertainers, sensitive to injustice and oppression, have for years played a prominent role in expressing their aversion to apartheid. Many have supported the struggle of the majority population in South Africa and have sought imaginative ways to support the international campaign for the elimination of apartheid. Since the 1960s, many artists and entertainers have refused to perform in apartheid South Africa or have prohibited their works from being shown there, while others have made a point of exhibiting or performing only before black audiences as a gesture of defiance of the regime. Still others have participated in anti-apartheid events or contributed financially and otherwise to the struggle against institutionalized racism in South Africa.

The movement for a cultural boycott of South Africa, as a demonstration of opposition to apartheid, began many years ago. Archbishop Huddleston, then Father Trevor Huddleston, in an article in The Observer (London), in October 1954, wrote:

> "I am pleading for a cultural boycott of South Africa. I am asking those who believe racialism to be sinful or wrong ... to refuse to encourage it by accepting any engagement to act, to perform as a musical artist or as a ballet dancer - in short, to engage in any contracts which would provide entertainment for any one section of the community."

Supported by an overwhelming majority of countries, organizations and individuals from the world of culture and entertainment, the cultural boycott of apartheid South Africa has now become an important component of the international campaign for the eradication of apartheid in South Africa through peaceful means.

II. CULTURAL ISOLATION OF APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA, 1965-1988

A. United Nations policy of cultural isolation

The international campaign for a cultural boycott of South Africa gathered momentum in 1965 when South Africa enacted stringent regulations prohibiting multiracial performances or audiences. The United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid (an intergovernmental group of 17 Governments), after consulting with a number of anti-apartheid movements and cultural personalities, decided that the United Nations should promote and encourage the cultural boycott of South Africa. On the recommendation of the Special Committee, the General Assembly, in resolution 2396 (XXIII) of 2 December 1968, requested "all States and organizations to suspend cultural, educational, sporting and other exchanges with the racist regime and with organizations and institutions in South Africa which practice apartheid".

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In the ensuing years, the efforts of the Special Committee found an encouraging response among Governments, cultural organizations and personalities. In June 1974, for example, the Government of Japan announced that it would no longer issue visas to South African nationals for the purpose of interchanges in the field of sports, culture and education. The Government of the Netherlands suspended its cultural agreement with South Africa after the Soweto massacre in 1976 and abrogated the agreement in 1981. Several countries that had formerly provided visa-free entry to South Africans instituted visa requirements.

The Government of South Africa, concerned over its increasing isolation, tried to restore international cultural and sporting contacts by relaxing certain apartheid regulations so as to allow some mixed-race performance and mixed audiences in some theaters, under permit, and tried to persuade entertainers that since multiracial performances and audiences were possible, they should no longer boycott South Africa. It was reported that secret funds and other means to break the boycott were also used. Many entertainers rejected South African offers, some at considerable sacrifice. They appreciated the stand taken by the black South Africans and by anti-apartheid movements that the reforms instituted by the regime were designed to maintain apartheid under more acceptable terms. Yet others, enticed by the propaganda and the tempting financial offers of the apartheid regime, or for other reasons, defied the boycott and performed in South Africa.

Under these circumstances, and on the recommendation of the Special Committee, the General Assembly adopted resolution 35/206 E of 16 December 1980, entitled "Cultural, academic and other boycotts of South Africa", and in 1981 decided to initiate a **register of cultural contacts with South Africa** in order to publicize and increase the effectiveness of the boycott called for by the General Assembly. After numerous appeals and notices to artists and entertainers who had performed in South Africa, the first issue of the Register of Entertainers, Actors and Other who have Performed in Apartheid South Africa was published in October 1983, listing artists and entertainers who had performed in that country in the previous two years. Updates of the Register appeared in December 1984, February 1986, March 1987 and August 1988. The Register is based mainly on press reports. The names of persons who inform the Special Committee that they do not intend to perform in apartheid South Africa until it is totally eradicated are regularly deleted from the Register by the Special Committee and press releases publicize these deletions. Since both that Register and the Register of Sports Contacts with South Africa were first issued, over 130 artists and 668 sports persons have announced that they do not intend to engage in cultural and sports activities in South Africa until apartheid is eliminated.

In recent years, the Special Committee has not only increased its efforts for the cultural isolation of South Africa by appealing to artists and cultural groups reported to be planning tours in South

Africa, it has also encouraged cultural personalities to participate in the international campaign against apartheid. The Special Committee has held hearings with several of them and has helped to organize events and other projects.

On 18 March 1982, for instance, the Special Committee co-sponsored a forum on the cultural boycott at United Nations Headquarters with the participation of several South African artists and writers in exile. In August 1982, it publicized the declaration of the O'Jays, a United States singing group, supporting the boycott of South Africa and urged all others to follow the example. On 24 October 1982, it supported the establishment of a "Unity in Action" network in New York for a cultural boycott of South Africa.

In the same year, the Special Committee promoted the collection of art works donated by over 85 well-known artists from all over the world on the initiative of Antonio Saura and Ernest Pignon-Ernest. The collection will be presented as a gift to the Government of a free and democratic South Africa elected by universal suffrage. Until that time, the collection is held in trust by the Association of Artists of the World against Apartheid, on behalf of the Cultural Foundation against Apartheid. Since its opening in Paris in 1983, the collection has been exhibited in Spain, Finland, Denmark, Italy, Greece, Germany, Japan and the United States of America, and at the United Nations Headquarters. The collection was on a two-year tour (1989-1990) in Japan, where it was displayed in various museums. Artists of world renown such as Leonardo Cremonini, Louis Le Brocquy, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Motherwell, Robert Rauschenberg, Antoni Tapies and Vladimir Velickovic donated their works to this collection.

Another important event was the festival and symposium on "Culture and Resistance", which took place at Gaborone from 5 to 9 July 1982, with the participation of many South African musicians, writers, artists and other cultural workers. The Special Committee also encouraged a conference on "The Cultural Voice of Resistance - South African and Dutch Artists against Apartheid", organized by the Netherlands Anti-Apartheid Movements at Amsterdam from 13 to 18 December 1982. The conference supported a cultural boycott of South Africa.

In September 1983, the Special Committee encouraged and assisted Transafrica, an organization based in the United States, and associated groups to establish "Artists and Athletes against Apartheid", under the leadership of Arthur Ashe and Harry Belafonte. The purpose of the organization is to promote the cultural and sports boycott of South Africa.

The CASA Foundation and the Anti-Apartheid Movement of the Netherlands organized, in cooperation with the United Nations Special Committee, the Culture in Another South Africa (CASA) Conference at Amsterdam from 12 to 19 December 1987 in cooperation with the

municipality of Amsterdam, various non-governmental organizations and individuals. The Conference discussed developments in the culture of liberation in South Africa as well as the cultural boycott of South Africa. The United Nations policy on the boycott was reaffirmed and other technical and political issues relevant to the subject were discussed in detail.

B. Activities by artists and cultural personalities

In recent years, the efforts for the cultural isolation of South Africa have made significant gains in the world, especially in the United States. There has been a notable decline in the number of entertainers, actors and others performing in South Africa. At the present stage very few well-known names are included in the Register. This has resulted from an increase in the international campaign against collaboration with the apartheid regime and its institutions, and in activities by artists acting individually or collectively. Several anti-apartheid and other non-governmental organizations, particularly in the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries, have successfully intensified their efforts to deter performers from visiting South Africa.

In the early 1980s, many artist refused to go to South Africa and several organizations intensified the boycott against that country. For instance, Sir Richard Attenborough, director of the film Gandhi, cancelled plans to attend the showing of the film in South Africa in April 1983; and the South African delegation was asked to leave the film festival at Capri in September 1983.

In 1985, Stevie Wonder, the prominent United States musician, accepted an Academy Award for his song "I just called to say I love you" in the name of Nelson Mandela as an act of solidarity with the struggle in South Africa. South Africa reacted by imposing a ban on Stevie Wonder's music. Stevie Wonder, who was also among those arrested while demonstrating in front of the South African Embassy in Washington, was honoured by the Special Committee in May 1985. On 23 July 1985, Woody Allen announced that, as a protest against South Africa's policies, he would no longer allow his films to be released in South Africa, and expressed the hope that others would follow his example.

In 1985, over 50 musical artists joined "Artists United against Apartheid" to record the anti-apartheid song entitled "Sun City". The song was composed by Little Steven (Steven Van Zandt), co-produced by Arthur Baker and sung by over 50 artists representing the fields of rock, rhythm and blues, jazz, rap, reggae, Latin, folk and African music. The song's message is "I won't play in Sun City", which is an entertainment complex in the "independent" homeland of Bophuthatswana in South Africa, where certain entertainers were enticed to perform.

In the same year, Albert Finney, the British actor, directed and acted in a film called The Biko Inquest, based on a play about the death in detention of black consciousness leader Steve Biko. In 1987 Sir Richard Attenborough directed Cry Freedom, a film based on the book written by white journalist Donald Woods about his relationship with Biko. Kevin Kline and Denzel Washington played the main roles. In 1988, South African director Chris Menges made A World Apart based on the life-story of Ruth First - a member of the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) who was killed by a parcel bomb in Mozambique in 1982 - and her daughter Shawn Slovo, who wrote the film screenplay. The film was acclaimed at the Cannes Festival (1988) and Barbara Hershey, who played Ruth First, shared the best actress award with the two other main actresses in the film.

In 1989, Paula Weinstein produced A Dry White Season, based on the book of Andre Brink and starring Marlon Brando, Donald Sutherland, Susan Sarandon and Zakes Moakes.

In November 1987, the United States-based Film-makers United Against Apartheid (FUAA) - which includes more than 100 prominent film-makers - sent a letter (signed by Woody Allen, Jonathan Demme, Spike Lee, Martin Scorsese and Susan Seidelman) to Mr. Ronald Reagan, then President of the United States, urging him to support fully the cultural boycott of South Africa sponsored by the United Nations. They urged Mr. Reagan to support stronger economic sanctions and, particularly in view of his previous leadership of the motion picture industry, to lead the entire industry in making a statement of conscience by refusing to distribute films in South Africa.

In Italy, the "Project against Apartheid" was conceived as a collective expression of the commitment of artists and others to the international campaign for the eradication of apartheid. Works of different artists were exhibited in galleries in Italy in 1987 and 1988.

In June 1988, the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) organized an 11-hour-long rock concert at Wembley Stadium in London in honour of Nelson Mandela's seventieth birthday. Some of the most famous rock and pop singers and several actors, actresses and dancers performed. The purpose of the concert was to inform the world audience about South Africa, apartheid and Mr. Mandela, the ANC leader who had then been in prison for 25 years. The concert was broadcast live by the British Broadcasting Commission (BBC) and was viewed by over a billion people in 60 countries. Another concert at Wembley was organized in 1990 in the presence of Nelson Mandela.

III. SYMPOSIUM ON CULTURE AGAINST APARTHEID, HELD AT ATHENS IN SEPTEMBER 1988

A watershed meeting on the subject, the Symposium on Culture against Apartheid, was organized by the Special Committee against

Apartheid in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture of Greece at Athens, in September 1988. Presided by Mrs. Melina Mercouri, then Minister for Culture of Greece, the Symposium was attended by 36 prominent artists, performers, film and theater directors and writers from all over the world, including Harry Belafonte, Michael Cacoyannis, Glenda Jackson, Joseph Papp, Maximilian Schell and the Nobel Laurate Wole Soyinka, as well as other artists and writers from South Africa, including Nadine Gordimer.

The participants considered the situation in South Africa and the international response, reviewed the role of artists and entertainers in the struggle against apartheid, and discussed the cultural boycott of South Africa and its implications. The Symposium endorsed the achievements of the cultural boycott against the apartheid culture of South Africa and the Policy Guidelines (see annex I to the present paper) for the boycott that had recently been adopted by the Special Committee, and adopted the Athens Appeal (see annex II), calling upon all writers, artists, musicians, composers, entertainers, actors, producers, distributors and other cultural workers in the international community to refuse to perform or have their works performed in South Africa. It urged the strengthening of the monitoring of the boycott and expressed full support for the efforts of the United Nations to promote the isolation of South Africa. However, the Appeal recognized the existance of an indigenous culture in South Africa which increasingly countered the culture of oppression. In this connection, because certain cultural contacts undermined apartheid, the Appeal urged that these contacts, in consultation with the national liberation movements of South Africa, be supported. Thus for the first time the definition of the cultural boycott introduced an important exception - the recognition by the Guidelines that a culture of oppressed people existed in South Africa. It emphasized that specific activities and contacts, which, in the view of the Special Committee, had the intent and effect of expressing opposition to apartheid, enriching that culture and furthering the liberation struggle, did not come within the scope of the cultural boycott.

IV. ACTIVITIES BY ARTISTS, CULTURAL PERSONALITIES AND OTHERS SINCE THE ATHENS SYMPOSIUM

The Special Committee has been implementing the recommendations of the Athens Symposium, the main objective of which is to help the international artistic community become more actively involved with the liberation struggle in South Africa.

In addition, the Special Committee has continued to encourage and support the cultural activities of the South African liberation movements recognized by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) - ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) - and has welcomed events that express solidarity with cultural workers in the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

At the Athens Symposium a resolution was also adopted calling for the formation of a Trust Fund for scholarships to be granted to young artists whose talents have been suppressed as a result of apartheid. In that connection, the Special Committee decided to support the already established African Arts Fund, as the Fund's objective is to provide scholarships to young South African artists who, because of apartheid, cannot pursue their artistic aspirations in their own country. To date the African Arts Fund has given over 30 large and a number of small support grants to artists and, upon their return to South Africa, they offer the community performers and cultural advisers, art teachers, administrators, managers and producers. Activities are already under way to raise funds, search for grants and engage in joint ventures with institutions and universities, thereby expanding the operations of the Fund.

In 1989, a group of Italian artists gave its work for inclusion in a travelling exhibit, which, with the support of the Italian Government, has been shown in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Senegal, the Soviet Union, the United States, France and Italy, in that order.

On 7 November 1989, the board of directors of the Screen Actors' Guild of the United States voted to reaffirm its position of October 1983 "in support of the cultural boycott of South Africa", and to urge members "to refuse to perform in South Africa or for a South African production company".

Artists who have refused to perform in South Africa have also taken positive actions to assist the liberation struggle in South Africa. Artists United against Apartheid in the United States played a critical role in July 1990 in mobilizing the artistic community in support of the visit of ANC leader Nelson Mandela to the United States. During a fund-raising dinner in New York City sponsored by, among others, singer (Little) Steven Van Zandt, actors Robert De Niro and Eddie Murphy and film director Spike Lee, about $US 500,000 was raised on behalf of ANC. This money was to be used in the process of re-establishing the organization in South Africa. In a brief address to that gathering, Mr. Mandela reiterated the support of ANC for the cultural boycott and stressed the important role of artists in enforcing such boycott. He appealed to artists to devote their efforts also to support those who were seeking to build a future South Africa. A similar fund-raising initiative by artists took place during Mr. Mandela's visit to Los Angeles.

In London, also in July 1990, the Zabalaza Festival took place with the purpose of discussing issues concerning the culture of resistance. "Culture as a weapon of struggle", which has been a subject of intense discussion among artists in South Africa, was the centerpiece of debate during the festival. Representatives of the Congress of South African Writers reiterated calls for a culture that is both politically directed and aesthetically advanced. In that context, they called for South African art to express "the totality of

human experience". Stressing the need to revive the strengths of traditional culture, a PAC representative said that "a great deal must be done to recover what we have lost". Other issues under discussion included conflict and culture and women and culture. In addition, several exhibits took place during the festival, including selections of photographs and paintings by South Africans living in South Africa and in exile. The festival ended with a discussion on post-apartheid culture.

At Glasgow (Scotland), from 23 to 27 September 1990, the Scottish Committee of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, in association with the Scottish Trades Union Congress and in consultation with ANC, organized the International Conference of Cultural Resistance to Apartheid. The objective of the Conference was to bring together artists from South Africa and their international counterparts to discuss the theme of "Cultural Resistance to Apartheid - For a United, Non-Racial and Democratic South Africa" and its relevance to people everywhere.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The cultural boycott of South Africa remains an essential component of the concerted international action aimed at isolating the apartheid régime. The recent positive steps taken by Pretoria attest to the fact that the boycott of South Africa, including the cultural boycott, has been an effective means of encouraging a political solution to the conflict in that country.

As recently as in 1990, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted on 19 December 1990 resolution 45/176 B on concerted and effective measures aimed at eradicating apartheid, which was supported by the Special Committee and in which the Assembly appealed "to all Governments, organizations and individuals to refrain from any sports relations with South Africa and not entertain any cultural and academic links unless any particular activity in the cultural and academic fields have the intent and effect of opposing apartheid in line with United Nations policy on this matter, and to give appropriate assistance in these fields to the anti-apartheid forces and to the disadvantaged sections of South African society".

The Special Committee has repeatedly expressed its appreciation to artists and entertainers who have declined to perform in South Africa, to those who have participated in anti-apartheid events and to those who have publicly expressed their aversion to apartheid. It has also conveyed its appreciation to artists who have dedicated their works, proceeds from performances or royalties to anti-apartheid causes and discussed the possibility of opening an honour's list made up of names prepared by organizations representing relevant sectors. The Special Committee has also expressed the hope that others will follow their example and use their talents and imagination in support of the international campaign against apartheid.

Artists are free spirits who can elect their own way to manifest opposition to apartheid; they can show their attachment to the highest ideals of art and culture to which apartheid is the antithesis. The Special Committee values greatly the contribution of artists and entertainers, as well as the relevant activities of Governments and anti-apartheid organizations, which ensure the isolation of South Africa in the cultural field and promote action by artists against apartheid.

Annex I

POLICY GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CULTURAL BOYCOTT OF SOUTH AFRICA

The international cultural boycott of South Africa is an integral component of the international campaign to isolate the apartheid regime of South Africa. It compliments the political and economic measures that have, over the years, been adopted against the regime, aiming at inducing Pretoria, through peaceful means, to dismantle apartheid.

Cultural activities in South Africa by non-South Africans violate General Assembly resolutions and the stand of the world cultural community calling for a cultural boycott of that country. The policy of a cultural boycott intrinsically denies Pretoria's claim to be a bearer of Western culture and a participant in world cultural, artistic and entertainment activities and provides the international cultural community with a means of expressing its abhorrence of apartheid. The policy also recognizes that a culture of the oppressed people exists in South Africa. Thus, specific activities and contacts which, in the view of the Special Committee, have the intent and effect of expressing opposition to apartheid, enriching this culture and furthering the liberation struggle, do not come within the scope of the cultural boycott.

The Special Committee against Apartheid, which has the responsibility for monitoring the implementation of United Nations resolutions on South Africa, publishes a Register of Entertainers, Actors and Others who have Performed in Apartheid South Africa. The Register includes names of non-South Africans who, in the view of the Special Committee, have violated the cultural boycott - in other words, those who have engaged in culturally related activities in South Africa, by performing, recording, making films or participating in a cultural event or by supporting or otherwise assisting in the organization or execution of any other cultural activity. The names of individuals and groups included in the list are deleted from the Register if they write to the Special Committee advising it that they will refuse in the future to engage in such activities in South Africa until apartheid is eradicated.

Thus, the policy of the United Nations on the cultural boycott of South Africa seeks:

(a) To persuade artists, entertainers and others involved in the world of culture not to perform in South Africa or to engage in any cultural contacts with it;

(b) To engage, support and promote the efforts of artists, entertainers and others to express in a positive and effective manner their opposition to the apartheid regime and their support of the United Nations efforts to eliminate apartheid.

The Special Committee against Apartheid, which maintains contacts with the national liberation movements recognized by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the anti-apartheid opposition in the country, has the responsibility for monitoring and implementing the cultural boycott. In this context, it plans to keep open channels with personalities from the world of culture, both inside and outside South Africa, and with non-governmental organizations and other relevant parties in order to ensure the most appropriate and effective implementation of this policy.

Annex II

ATHENS APPEAL

We, artists and writers, meeting here in Athens, a place that has given the world an enduring legacy of freedom, democracy and culture, endorse the achievements of the cultural boycott against the apartheid culture of South Africa, and call for an intensification of this boycott.

We note:

(a) The increased repression in apartheid South Africa and the increased resistance to such oppression through armed struggle, industrial and cultural action;

(b) That apartheid's culture of oppression is increasingly being countered by the culture of liberation;

(c) The increasing impact of all forms of pressure in the international campaign against apartheid.

We appeal to all writers, artists, musicians, composers, entertainers, actors, producers, distributors and other cultural workers in the international community to refuse to perform or to have their works performed in South Africa.

We urge the strengthening of structures of consultation inside and outside South Africa to ensure the broad-based support and monitoring of the boycott.

We recognize that certain cultural contacts undermine apartheid and that, in consultation with the national liberation movements of South Africa, these should be supported.

We fully support the United Nations in its efforts to promote the isolation of apartheid South Africa and commend this as an important element augmenting the struggle of the people of South Africa for liberation.

Courtesy of UN Centre against Apartheid